

John Heskett: A Testament

We are saddened by the recent passing of John Heskett (February 25, 2014). He was instrumental in the development of design history and design studies since their inceptions in the late 1970s. John's degree in economics, at the London School of Economics, shaped his thinking about design whether as an historian, a consultant, or a policy maker. He taught at institutions in Europe, the United States, and Asia throughout his career, but he was also influential in worlds of business and government where he often addressed business leaders and high-ranking government officials. John believed strongly that design could make a major difference to the advancement of national economies; and, he helped many people—in positions of influence—to understand that concept and to develop policies and plans in which they could make design central to their own activities. He understood design's relation to economics and was able to speak persuasively on that issue.

As a professor, John taught several generations of design students and contributed meaningfully to their understanding of design's potential in society. Studying with John meant that you—as a design student—had to learn about all the factors that surround the planning, production and distribution of design—particularly, economics, marketing, and policy. John may have been the first design studies scholar to strongly emphasize the need for national design policies. He made a particularly strong contribution to the development of design policy and strategy in Asian countries, which have recently connected to design more so than countries in the West. His lectures in Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Japan, and Thailand helped government officials, business people, and educators devise plans to improve the understanding and practice of design in their respective countries. John was equally sought after in Europe and the United States for lectures to economists, managers, and design researchers. He contributed to the curriculum at the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute

of Technology, which puts a particularly strong emphasis on design's relation to business strategy. At the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, where he spent his last years as a professor, he served as a consultant to the President and helped to revamp the design curriculum.

John's scholarship as a design historian also contributed new directions to an emerging field—one in which he was among the first of professors. He was drawn to design history in Germany, perhaps because design was so closely allied with institutional policies there. He wrote a particularly cogent article about design in the Third Reich, which continues to be helpful in explaining how Hitler used design to advance his political ends. His book about design at the Dutch appliance and electronic firm Phillips was as much about institutional policy as it was about the products the company made. However, John had his broadest influence as a design historian with his brief history textbook, *Industrial Design*, which remains in print and in use after more than thirty years. In that book, John was the first design historian to include the design of military technology in his narrative of industrial design's development. This is an approach that few other design historians have followed up on, though it serves as a much-needed counterpart to the design of furniture, appliances, and other objects of everyday life.

John had a relation to *Design Issues* from the first issue, where he reviewed Arthur Pulos' *American Design Ethic* and a monograph on *Russel Wright*. He also played a seminal role in shaping one of the journal's first special issues, *Design in Asia and Australia*. Most of the contributors to that issue, in fact, were John's colleagues. He served on the journal's editorial board in the early 1990s when he was teaching at the Institute of Design.

With our understanding, today, of design's robust part in the unfolding of modern history and how design can contribute to business strategy and economic policy, we owe much to John Heskett. The continued engagement of *Design Issues* and other journals in these fields would be far less rich without his contributions.

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